Purported Cuban letter lauds Oswald as a shooter

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WASHINGTON—A letter purportedly from a Cuban to Lee Harvey Oswald praises Oswald's marksmanship and refers to an "affair" in which both are involved, newly released CIA documents show.

The letter was dated Nov. 10, 1963, 12 days before President John F. Kennedy's assassination but was not postmarked until Nov. 28, raising questions about its authenticity.

The letter was described in a secret CIA memo made public this week. Addressed to "Friend Lee," the letter was written in Spanish and signed "Pedro Charles."

"You ought to close the business as soon as possible, like I told you before in Miami," the letter states, according to the CIA's translation. "Do not be foolish with the money I gave you. So I hope you will not defraud me and that our dreams will be realized. After the affair I am going to recommend much to the Chief."

The letter does not identify "the Chief." But the writer says he told the Chief, "You could put out a candle at 50 meters," an apparent reference to Oswald's shooting ability.

The CIA memo raises questions about the letter's authenticity, particulary because of the 18-day gap in dates.

The memo notes that the type face and signature match that of another letter also postmarked from Havana on Nov. 28 and addressed to then-Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy, the slain president's brother.

That letter was signed "Mario del Rosario Molina." The text of the letter to Robert Kennedy was not included in the memo.

Assassination experts said the letter to Oswald has long been known to investigators with access to secret assassination files. They said it may have been a fake, perhaps designed to falsely implicate the Castro regime in the assassination.

"I suspect it's a fabrication or something that could have been used to set up Oswald," said James Lesar, director of the Assassination Archives and Research Center, a private, Washington-based trove of assassination records.

Gaeton Fonzi, a staff member of two congressional investigations into the Kennedy assassination, said the letter was probably connected to an elaborate misinformation campaign directed by "assets" of the CIA and designed to discredit Castro.

"The strategy is to inject confusion," Fonzi said.

The Warren Commission concluded that Oswald acted alone in killing Kennedy, though other theories have been advanced.